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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006263

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAD](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#) [SETTLEMENTS](#)

SUBJECT: SPIEGEL WANTS TO MOVE FORWARD ON EASING MOVEMENT
RESTRICTIONS; EMPHASIZES NEED FOR SCANNERS FOR KARNI

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Ministry of Defense (MOD) advisor Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel told the Ambassador in a recent meeting that terrorists had taken advantage of the removal of some obstacles to movement in Gush Etzion to perpetrate the October 16 deadly shooting attack against Israeli settlers. He said that the GOI wants to make Palestinians' lives easier, but the "day-to-day tactics" of terrorists affect the GOI's overall strategy. Spiegel nevertheless expressed his willingness to work with the U.S. on determining locations in the West Bank where the GOI can reduce roadblocks and allow the Palestinian Authority (PA) to take over security. He also discussed the Rafah crossing with the Ambassador, and said he needs clear guidelines from the political echelon before final technical issues on management and security can be resolved. He highlighted the GOI's need for scanners in Karni, but said it could make do with a portable scanner for now. Spiegel reported that the plans to civilianize Karni are on hold for the time being. End summary.

The Impact of the Gush Etzion Attack
and Movement in the West Bank

12. (C) Ministry of Defense (MOD) advisor Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel told the Ambassador on October 17 that the shooting attack in Gush Etzion took place after the GOI had removed some roadblocks and checkpoints in the area three months ago. He said the GOI had wanted to send positive signals to the Palestinians with the easing of movement, but noted that terrorists almost always take advantage of the openings. He cited as an example the attack at The Stage nightclub in Tel Aviv. Spiegel commented that Israel has a "master plan" to ease movement in the West Bank, but added that the "day-to-day tactics" of terrorists are very problematic and affect the overall strategy of trying to make life easier for Palestinians. He explained that when an attack takes place, the IDF immediately closes roads to undertake its investigation. This creates problems for Palestinians and they blame the GOI instead of the terrorists who perpetrate the attacks. He opined that the Palestinian Authority (PA) should take some responsibility on the ground to control the rejectionist groups.

13. (C) Spiegel continued that his office had a meeting with the U.N. Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) six months ago where both parties agreed to count the number of obstacles to movement in the West Bank and subsequently negotiate locations where the obstacles could be removed to increase movement and help the economy. Spiegel reported that OCHA and the MOD are now working from a "common map" after various technical meetings and have agreed on the number of checkpoints present, with a discrepancy of some 40-60 obstacles, but that he is still waiting for OCHA's suggestions on where to remove some obstacles. The MOD is looking for a location where the PA can take more local responsibility, taking into account the economic and security impact on Palestinians and Israelis.

14. (C) The Ambassador said that easing movement in the West Bank would help PA President Mahmud Abbas by allowing economic activity and social connections to take place, which would foster moderation. Spiegel agreed, noting that it is also in Israel's interest to help Abbas in the upcoming elections. He commented, however, that he wants to work with the U.S. before making a final decision with the PA. He added that working with OCHA is also difficult, and that the GOI would prefer to work with the USG on this issue because easing movement in the West Bank is part of Israel's commitments to the U.S. under the Weissglas-Rice exchange of letters. Spiegel noted that the Jenin area where the IDF evacuated the four northern West Bank settlements has a lot of potential and EconCouns offered to put together a team to study the issue with the GOI. In response to a question, Spiegel replied that Jenin would practically change from Area C status to Area B status, but not officially.

Rafah and Karni Crossings

15. (C) Spiegel reported that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would be making a decision very soon on how Vice Prime

Minister Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz would share the responsibility of running the Rafah crossing. (Note: Since this meeting, press reports have indicated that Mofaz will be responsible for Rafah, and Peres will be in charge of the West Bank/Gaza Strip link. Our GOI contacts, however, tell us that the issue of responsibility for passages is still in dispute. End note.) Spiegel noted that the technical issues on management and security cannot be completely resolved until his team has clear guidelines from the political echelon, although he mentioned that his team is working on some recommendations nevertheless. He also said that whatever political and technical decisions are made now would be precedents for the running of other crossings in the future. The Ambassador commented that the procedures established at Rafah could be transferred to Karni and Erez, and Spiegel agreed, emphasizing the importance of Rafah. He said that his team would continue to work with the PA and Special Envoy Jim Wolfensohn, but assessed that at the technical level, it "isn't enough because we need high-level guidelines."

16. (C) Spiegel highlighted the GOI's need for scanners in 2-3 months at Karni, suggesting that until the tenders go out, the GOI could make do with at least one portable scanner. Jim Bever, Director of USAID, told Spiegel that USAID's lawyers were looking at the GOI's tender to address the financing of the scanners, but said that a mobile scanner could be provided 30 days after the tender is awarded. He asked if Israel could hire more people and add extra shifts to man the portable scanners until the permanent scanners arrive, and Spiegel responded that Israel does not have the budget for extra shifts. He said he asked the Ministry of Finance (MOF) for extra funds, but MOF officials said they could not give him the money. Spiegel claimed he asked Mofaz to look into it because for now, there "is no budget for it."

17. (C) In response to questions about the GOI's plan to civilianize the crossings and whether estimates of \$3-5 million per year for operations are correct, Spiegel replied that the GOI has stopped making plans to civilianize Karni because the GOI had wanted to use part of the \$50 million in U.S. aid to run the crossing but the aid is only for scanners. He said Israel would civilianize Erez, Kerem Shalom, and Sha'ar Efrayim for now, and will go to the MOF later when the MOD has calculated how much money it will need for Karni.

18. (C) Bever asked whether the GOI would be willing to participate in an exchange of letters with the PA to show that negotiations on crossings are moving in the spirit of door-to-door transfer versus back-to-back. Spiegel responded that it is possible, but asked the Ambassador to discuss the issue with Mofaz because it will depend on the security situation. Spiegel added that the GOI in the meantime would work to make back-to-back more efficient.

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JONES